

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03 NSC-05
PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 TRSE-00 OMB-01 HA-05
IO-13 BIB-01 /097 W
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R 030801Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0000
INFO AMCONSUL IBADAN
AMCONSUL KADUNA
USICA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 5531

E.O. 11652: GDS
SUBJECT: PRESS FREEDOM: CENSORSHIP IN BENDEL STATE?

REF: (A) LAGOS 5441, (B) LAGOS 5368

1. ACCORDING TO A MAY 2 FRONTPAGE STORY IN PUNCH, THE GOVERNMENT IN BENDEL STATE HAS SET UP A THREE-MAN PANEL TO CENSOR ALL MATERIAL MEANT FOR PUBLICATION OR USE IN MEDIA CONTROLLED BY THE STATE GOVERNMENT. PUNCH REPORTS THE PANEL CONSISTS OF THE STATE'S CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER, PETER AYENI, A FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE NIGERIA UNION OF JOURNALISTS, ALONG WITH AN ARMY MAJOR AND A CHIEF INSPECTOR OF POLICE. THE PANEL WILL REVIEW ALL MATERIAL TO BE USED IN THE NIGERIAN OBSERVER OR ON NTV (BENIN) AND THE STATE STATION OF RADIO NIGERIA. IT IS EMPOWERED TO EXCLUDE ANY MATERIAL WHICH IN ITS VIEW IS "INIMICAL TO GOVERNMENT INTEREST."

2. PUNCH STORY SAYS THE EXECUTIVES OF THE
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THREE NEWS ORGANIZATIONS WERE INFORMED OF THE NEW SYSTEM ON APRIL 26 BY BENDEL STATE GOVERNOR, COMMODORE HUSSEIN ABDULLAHI. PUNCH QUOTES THE GOVERNOR THAT THE MEASURE WAS DICTATED "FROM ABOVE" AND WOULD TAKE EFFECT IMMEDIATELY. UNDER THE NEW SYSTEM, MATERIAL TO BE USED IN THE NIGERIAN OBSERVER IS TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE

PANEL BY NOON EACH DAY WHILE TV AND RADIO NEWS MATERIAL MUST TURN OVER PROGRAM MATERIAL IN THE AFTERNOON BEFORE BROADCAST.

3. COMMENT: THE STORY IN PUNCH COULD BE INACCURATE; HOWEVER, IF IT TURNS OUT TO BE CORRECT, IT WOULD MARK A SUBSTANTIAL DEVIATION FROM THE FMG'S CURRENT POLICY OF INDIRECT, NONINSTITUTIONAL MONITORING OF THE MEDIA IN NIGERIA.

4. UNDER THE PRESENT SYSTEM, ALEX NWOKEDI, PRESS SECRETARY TO THE CHIEF OF STATE, HOLDS GENERAL MEETINGS, USUALLY ON THURSDAY EACH WEEK, WITH THE EDITORS OF ALL THE COUNTRY'S NEWSPAPERS IN ORDER TO DISCUSS GOVERNMENTAL POLICY. AT THAT TIME, NWOKEDI INDICATES THE GENERAL LINES OF WHAT THE FMG WANTS AND DOESN'T WANT TO SEE IN THE PRESS. DEPENDING UPON THE CIRCUMSTANCES, MORE SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS MAY BE GIVEN. FOR EXAMPLE, LAST OCTOBER BEFORE THE OBASANJO VISIT TO WASHINGTON, EDITORS WERE TOLD BY NWOKEDI TO END THE SPATE OF ARTICLES CRITICIZING THE PLANNED VISIT. SIMILARLY BEFORE THE PROMULGATION OF THE RECENT LAND USE DECREE, NWOKEDI WAS WARNED ABOUT ITS CONFIDENTIAL

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POTENTIAL UPOPULARITY BY MEMBERS OF THE SMC AND INDICATED THAT THE PRESS WOULD TAKE AN APPROPRIATELY UPBEAT NOTE IN REPORTING THE DECREE. END COMMENT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CENSORSHIP, PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LAGOS05531
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780188-0722
Format: TEL
From: LAGOS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780598/aaaadfry.tel
Line Count: 99
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: ab3a23a5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 LAGOS 5441, 78 LAGOS 5368
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2806893
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESS FREEDOM: CENSORSHIP IN BENDEL STATE?
TAGS: SOPN, PGOV, NI, (AYENI, PETER), (NWOKEDI, ALEX)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/ab3a23a5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014